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TO : Department of State

755.11/3-1550

FROM : BRUSSELS 308 March 15,1950

REF : Brussels Despatch 289 of March 4, 1950

SUBJECT : THE BELGIAN ROYAL QUESTION: ANTI-LEOPOLDIST RALLY ADDRESSED BY PAUL-HENRI SPAAK ON MARCH 4, 1950

ACTION EUR

INFO DCR POS EUR/X 9330

It is of interest, with particular reference to pages 4 and 5 of the reference despatch which recited the Socialist case against King Leopold III in the present heated campaign preceding the Popular Consultation which will take place on March 12, to submit the text of a memorandum prepared by Second Secretary Benjamin J. RUYLE, reporting a large anti-Leopoldist rally which was held in Brussels March 4, and at which the principal speaker was former Prime Minister Paul-Henri SPAAK. The main arguments already outlined in the various despatches on this subject were reiterated by M. Spaak, but one or two additional details of historical interest were revealed by the principal speaker. For example, we had not previously seen any statement such as that made by M. Spaak on March 4 that, on May 15, 1940, Prime Minister PIERLOT had informed him of a conversation with the King on the preceding day, in which the sovereign had indicated that Belgium should be careful not to commit itself too strongly with France and England as the outcome of the war seemed assured in Germany's favor.

Despite the distinction and eloquence of the Socialist leader, the Embassy has no reason to revise its previously-expressed opinion that few convictions will be changed at the last moment by the orators on either side.

Robert McClintock
Robert McClintock
First Secretary of Embassy

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March 15,1950

Enclosure No. 1 to Brussels Despatch No. 308

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MEMORANDUM

RESTRICTED

TO: Mr. Robert M. McClintock

FROM: Benjamin J. Ruyle

SUBJECT: Anti-Leopoldist Rally of March 4, 1950

Spaak's speech Saturday night was essentially a repetition of the one I heard him give on February 16, with the exceptions that he spoke both at greater length (one and-a-half hours), having added a few points, and was, I think, more effective owing perhaps to polish gained from repetition plus the stimulus of a larger crowd.

There were possibly 500 persons in the front seats of the stadium when I arrived at 6:45 p.m. When the orators began at 8 p.m., there were 3,000 or more persons seated as nearly as I could estimate and several hundred standing, almost all of whom were still there when Spaak ended his speech two and-a-half hours later. Dore SMETS spoke in Flemish, apparently very effectively, from 8 - 9; Spaak, from 9 - 10:30. In his exordium, as before, Spaak declared the Socialists had never desired popular consultation which they considered to be a crime against the nation committed by the King and the PSC. He noted that after the war, the Flemish-Walloon problem was as nearly solved as ever before in the nation's history and that now Belgium must suffer this divisive strain. If, as appears certain, the King is unable to obtain a majority in Wallonia, he can never reign as king of the Walloons. If, as is probable, he does obtain a majority in Flanders, the question is, could he then be king of the Belgians (crowd:"No"). Brussels is probably the decisive factor. "If, as I believe, the King receives a majority neither in Brussels nor in Wallonia, he can never return to Belgium or reign as king." (Applause).

Despite the smoke screen thrown up by the PSC, the only issue at stake in thispopular consultation so far as the Socialists are concerned is Leopold III and his personal and unconstitutional military and political acts during the war. In view of this fact, the pious injunctions of the PSC concerning the inviolability of the

King

King make no sense. Under the constitution, any decree of the King must bear the countersignature of a minister who thereby assumes responsibility for the decree on behalf of the government and who may find the decree freely criticized in Parliament and elsewhere. When the King presumes to take governmental action contrary to that of the duly elected government, he forfeits all claim to inviolability. "The King should reign and not govern." The Leopoldists, unable to meet this issue squarely, are trying to "drown the fish" by muddying the waters. In their propaganda they cleverly associate Leopold's name with the names of Leopold I, II, and Albert I. No one denies the greatness of these three who preceded Leopold III on the Belgian throne. Their example, however, makes all the more inexcusable the unconstitutional acts of Leopold during the war. The PSC tries further to confuse the issue by stating that the monarchy itself is at stake. Spaak reiterated that four of the five Western European nations who retain their monarchies have Socialist governments. This point was made by Spaak on February 16 and also by Dore Smets, as I was able to understand quite clearly despite my unfamiliarity with Flemish.

Spaak accused the Leopoldists of avoiding the question further by asserting that a vote against the King is a vote for Communism. This he rebutted with the assertion that Communism finds its fertile soil in the reactionary non-progressive totalitarian regimes of the sort which the Socialists are now combatting. Spaak ended his discussion of the Leopoldists' arguments by suggesting that his hearers read the Leopoldist pamphlets for themselves in order to become aware of their inability to face the question fairly.

As on February 16, he noted that since the issue is Leopold III and his acts during the war, it is necessary to review recent Belgian history in order to reach a conclusion, saying which, he returned as before to the alliance of April 24, 1937 among France, Great Britain, and Belgium. This alliance called upon Belgium (1) to defend its borders against aggression, and (2) to deny the use of its soil for the mounting of an attack of an aggressor against France and Great Britain. Reminding his listeners repeatedly of this alliance and particularly of the second provision, Spaak emphasized that the King had raised no objections to the alliance nor given any indication of what apparently were his true feelings until after the invasion on May 10, 1940. Spaak states that on May 15, 1940, he talked briefly with M. Pierlot in the Defense Ministry, and that as he departed, M. Pierlot stopped Spaak on the Rue de la Loi (Spaak claims to be able to indicate the exact spot even to this day) to inform him of a conversation with the King the preceding day. The King had indicated that Belgium should be careful not to commit itself too strongly with France and England as the outcome of the war seemed assured in Germany's favor. Spaak repeated that he could find nothing in the constitution requiring a Belgian soldier to lay down his arms when he crossed the imaginary line which serves as a boundary between Belgium and France and stated that had the nation as a whole followed the

King's

"neutrality" policy, Belgium would have ended the war on the side of the vanquished rather than on the side of the conquerors. He emphasized that not only was the King's position at variance with that of his government, but that it was also at variance with that of his people. Spaak alluded to the fact of which La Libre Belgique apparently has made much, namely that he asserted his loyalty to the King from exile in London. He admitted this in effect by saying that he had made certain mistakes undeniably and added that had the King corrected his (the King's) mistakes even as late as 1944, there would have been no royal question. Spaak stated that he had written the King in 1943 urging him to proclaim that Belgium was still fighting the war beside his French and British allies, assuring the King that the following year we see the beginning of the liberation and informing the King that by taking such a step could the latter hope to repair the damage of his personal policy of "neutrality". Spaak drew a sympathetic exclamation from the audience on behalf of the bearer of this missive, the brother-in-law of M. Pierlot, when he explained the latter had volunteered for the mission, had accomplished it, but had been subsequently captured and shot by the Germans. He read from the King's reply written in 1944 noting particularly the King's defense of his actions as a means of assuring Belgium's future whatever the outcome of the war.

The remainder of the evening was devoted to discussion of Leopold's marriage and offspring. Spaak denied that the King's marriage was a private matter. By the constitution and by its effects the marriage of the King has undeniable political repercussions and therefore is a satisfactory subject for debate at the present time. He mentioned the unconstitutional civil ceremony involving the highest prelate of the realm, the resumption of the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha patronymic, the renunciation by the Princesse de Rethy of something which may or may not have been hers to renounce, namely the queenship. In connection with the renunciation of the queenship, Spaak asserted that no Belgian knows whether if Leopold returns he will bring with him a queen or merely a wife. He reasserted that in accordance with Article 60 of the constitution, Prince Alexander is in direct line of succession to the throne as a "natural, direct, legitimate" male descendant of Leopold I.

Spaak referred again to the flowers and felicitations of the Fuehrer at Leopold's marriage "to a member of his own race and religion" and to the King's condolences to Victor Emanuel at the death of an Italian prince who had only recently led troops against Belgians in North Africa and in which Leopold referred specifically to the gentleman's military prowess. Spaak asserted that had the King been sincere in his neutrality, he should have sent condolences to the King of England on the death of the Duke of Kent through channels which were available to him. He ended as before by asserting that all democratic right thinking Belgians would vote "No" on March 12.

American Embassy
Brussels, Belgium

March 6, 1950
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